

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

In the era of globalization and increasing competition for jobs, the ability to speak English is an important asset for graduates of Vocational High Schools (SMK). In learning English, there are four language skills that all students must master: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. All these skills cannot be separated from each other. Among these skills, speaking is the most important skill for learning a foreign or second language. Speaking skills are taught to students so that they can use English in real communication. In reality, the speaking competence of vocational students in Indonesia is still a problem. Although students know that learning English as a second language is helpful, most Indonesian students say that they cannot speak English because they are not foreigners and never speak English in daily life, and they are also afraid of making mistakes and often use their native language (Fitriana, 2023).

In the Indonesian educational context, teachers often emphasize reading and grammar more than speaking when teaching English. However, to improve speaking skills, students need regular practice. Since English is not the native language in Indonesia, opportunities to speak English are limited, making it challenging for students to develop fluency. Additionally, many students struggle to express themselves in English due to a lack of daily practice and fear of judgment from peers. This anxiety can disrupt conversations and make speaking activities feel inefficient. To address these challenges, students can adopt strategies like rephrasing their sentences and using gestures to convey their meaning, helping them communicate more smoothly and confidently.

Students often struggle to find opportunities to practice speaking English outside the classroom. As a result, school becomes the primary place where they are encouraged to learn and use the language. Although students gain some speaking experience through classroom activities, their proficiency remains limited because they rarely use English in daily life. In the classroom, the teacher acts as a facilitator by (1) giving instructions, (2) explaining tasks clearly, (3) guiding activities, and (4) providing feedback. However, many students still hesitate to speak due to fear of making mistakes or being judged by their peers. This lack of confidence disrupts conversations and makes speaking activities less effective. Consequently, improving students' speaking skills remains a challenge in English language learning.

Based on the writer's experience when doing PLP II at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan and teaching in class, students' speaking ability in English is still quite low because many of them feel shy and not confident. The students were afraid of being laughed at by their friends when they made mistakes when speaking in English especially in conversation. The students also find it difficult to speak in English because they are confused about how to say and convey their thoughts. According to Article 18 of the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Vocational High School (SMK) is defined as a secondary education that prepares students to work in a particular field. As an institution that prepares workers, SMKs are required to be able to produce workers who have the skills needed by the world of work.

In accordance with the explanation above, this study aims to find out the students' strategies in overcoming speaking problems in conversation experienced by eleventh grade vocational high school students. Therefore, this research is named

“Students’ Strategies in Overcoming Speaking Problems in Conversation in SMKN 1 Percut Sei Tuan”.

1.2. Formulation of the Problem

The problem formulation in this research is as follows:

- 1) What are the problems faced by students in English Conversation in grade XI of SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan?
- 2) How do students at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan overcome their difficulties in English conversations?

1.3. The Objectives of the Study

Based on the research problems, the research objectives are as follows:

- 1) To find out the students' problems in English conversation in grade XI of SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
- 2) To find out the strategies used by students’ problems in English conversation at XI SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.

1.4. The Scope of the Study

This research is limited to know strategies used by students in overcoming English conversation problems. The sample of this research is students of class X – DPIB 1 at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.

1.5. The Significance of the Study

This research is expected to make the following theoretical and practical contributions:

1) Theoretical Perspective

This research will contribute to increasing students' understanding the kind of strategies used by students to overcome difficulties in English conversation.

2) Practical Perspective

A. For Teachers

Teachers can analyze the types of problems students have in speaking. In addition, teachers know what to do to overcome students' speaking problems. As a result, they can improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and improve students' speaking skills.

B. For Students

Students can learn about their problems and strategies to keep the communication going on relevant to their own speaking problems.

C. For Schools

This study can be used to improve the quality of learning and innovation of teaching English speaking ability at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.

D. For Other Research

The findings in this study can be used as a reference or guideline, especially in researching the difficulties of speaking skills in English.